



Connecticut Working Families Organization
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Testimony from Lindsay Farrell, Connecticut state director of the Working Families Organization.

Senator Cassano, Representative Jutilla, and members of the committee:

Testimony regarding SB1051 AA Strengthening Connecticut's Elections and in Opposition to SB6900 AAC Election Administration

Working Families is a growing progressive political organization that fights for an economy that works for all of us, and a democracy in which every voice matters. We believe that our children's life chances must not be determined at birth, and that America must be a nation that allows all its people to thrive. We believe that our economy is out of whack when wages are stagnant and good jobs are harder and harder to come by, but the very wealthiest just get richer and richer. And we believe that far too often, our democracy is not accessible or empowering to the vast majority of Americans.

Let me begin by stating that Working Families is fully committed to an elections infrastructure that can ensure that all voters are able to cast their votes, election results are available in a transparent, timely way, and that our elections earn the full faith of Connecticut's voters and residents. Specifically, the events in Hartford in the most recent election on November 4th 2014 that created obstacles to voting, and similar incidents when voters encountered problems or irregularities at the polls, are completely unacceptable to us.

Working Families does, however, have concerns with the proposal before us in SB1051. Rather than raising standards, many of these policies eliminate needed resources or perpetuate the problem of inadequate resources for our elections administration, or exacerbate local political patronage rather than cure it. We urge consideration of the following:

- The notion that an appointed elections administrator would be somehow un-politicized is faulty, especially in a proposal that would make that appointment the responsibility of (usually elected) town clerks. Right now our registrars are accountable to the political parties that nominate them and to the voters who elect them – same as all our other elected officials. If they are appointed by a city official, they will be accountable to the demands of that officer, however politicized those demands are, and voters will have no recourse whatsoever when they feel failed by

the performance of this appointee. In short the people who run our elections will be there at the whim of a politician, who can direct them without accountability to fulfill the political agenda of that politician.

- By eliminating half (or more in some cases) the registrar positions, we are essentially eliminating half the elections administrations staff. This is a massive cut that will result in fewer office hours, less outreach, and more of a strain on local offices to conduct elections properly.
- There has been a lot of discussion about employing trained, professionalized individuals to administer our elections, but this legislation does nothing to improve training or professional development. Alternatively, the registrar certification program (passed in 1998) or the Election Training Unit (passed in 2006) would be good programs for state elections administrators to resource and implement. If we are worried that our local elections officials lack the training necessary to succeed in their positions, let's dedicate to providing that training to them before we replace them with another group that will also need to be trained and won't be accountable to voters. We encourage certification for all registrars, and are proud that our only Working Families Party registrar, Urania Petit, has completed her certification through the Elections Center, and is the only certified registrar in the state.

Working Families supports changes to improve outcomes in our local elections administration, and any characterization that advocates who oppose the appointee system do not is inaccurate. But we believe that this proposal misses the mark on some accounts.

Working Families **opposes SB 6900**, which takes a bad law and makes it worse. We reiterate our position about another bill, SB 6901, which seeks to replace this clause so that candidates are never nominated without their knowledge and minor parties do not continue to spend time and resources on unnecessary paperwork. We prefer to do away with an administrative requirement that is both unnecessary and burdensome for minor parties. We support replacing the signature requirement with a notification requirement for the following reasons:

- Minor parties do not regularly nominate candidates who do not want our support, so the signature requirement is a solution to a problem that does not exist. In the case of the WFP, candidates who have already filled out questionnaires, met with us to interview for our support, and in many other ways indicated that they wish to appear on our ballot line need to be tracked down for a signature during busy campaign seasons. Both the candidate and the party would rather spend this time and energy on getting a message out to voters.
- Minor parties have many different requirements from the major parties – we have to meet petition requirements, Citizen Election Program thresholds, and other standards, no matter how many elections we are on the ballot for or how many candidates we support and elect. This additional administrative requirement is just unnecessary and another hoop to jump through.

- The signature requirement has blocked the democratic process for other minor parties. In 2013, several minor party candidates were denied access to the ballot over this trivial paperwork issue. That's simply unfair. http://articles.courant.com/2013-10-09/news/hc-ed-minority-party-wins-ballot-access-20131009_1_minor-party-candidates-chatham-party-election-officials
- The solution proposed in another bill, SB 6901, ensures that in the (extraordinarily unlikely) event that a candidate is unwillingly endorsed, that they will be informed and then be able to reject the nomination. Before the law was changed to require a signature in 2011, this almost never happened, but the language in this bill protects candidates in case it ever does again.

Thank you for your consideration.